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LEONORA CARRINGTON: A BESTIARY

By

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B.A., Western Kentucky University, 2011

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

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A Thesis Approved on

August 6, 2019

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ABSTRACT

LEONORA CARRINGTON: A BESTIARY

Stephanie Wise

August 6, 2019

Similar to the painted creatures that dwell within the illuminated manuscripts of ancient and medieval bestiaries, the beasts in Leonora Carrington's early work are used metaphorically. She was deeply influenced in her formative years by mythology and animals; tales with heraldic characters, obscure adventures, and symbolic meanings were foundational to her works. World War II and a subsequent internment in a sanatorium initiated Carrington to wrestle with an existential crisis. Her capacity and appetite for sources of inspiration and knowledge was boundless; infinite symbolic references were readily available for her artistic executions. The metaphors adapted or created by Carrington enabled her to resolve her personal crises and come to an understanding the world that confounded her. By analyzing the animals and fantastical creatures in Carrington's early work through the encyclopedic schema of the bestiary, the interconnected discourses and symbols can be singularly examined and consequently the artist's psyche can be better understood.

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INTRODUCTION

Now, you must know Moskoski, is not on the earth, it is on a little planet called Starvinski, it is far beyond Neptune, and almost amongst the stars. In fact this story would not have been written only, (7 thousand years ago,) a man, called Youbitus, got a “Minor Plane” and flew to Starvinski, so discovered all these animals which are in this book. –Leonora Carrington, age 10, in ‘Animals of a Different Planit’ [sic]

Early life

Leonora Carrington was born into a bourgeois, English family in 1917—a little more than a year before the end of World War I. While Carrington would later become known as a surrealist artist and author, examples of the prominent themes and focal

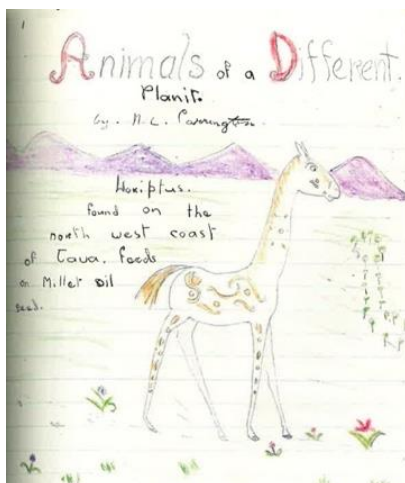


Figure 1: Leonora Carrington, 'Animals of a Different Planit,' from Leonora Carrington's personal notebook, c. 1927

points that would permeate her work can be traced all the way back to her early childhood. Fantastical descriptions and illustrations, such as those found in her personal notebook, show that Carrington was interested in creating and exploring worlds foreign from her own from a young age. “Animals of a Different Planit” is filled with made-up places, such as Moskoski and the Sea of Sagoon, and other-worldly creatures [fig. 1],

such as the Horiptus and an unnamed, dragon-like figure with feathery wings and hooves. These creations highlight Carrington's vivid imagination, and this penchant for fantasy was in part shaped through stories told to her by the motherly figures in her life and the many travel opportunities that her family's wealth afforded.

The Irish women that surrounded Carrington during her childhood, including her mother, Mairi, grandmother Moorhead, and her nanny, Mary Kavanaugh, helped to form Carrington's imagination through their numerous recollections of Celtic fairytales and lore. Carrington absorbed the culture's richness of myth and magic through these stories – it is evident in her paintings of Samhain traditional feasts and Sidhe, the ancient fairy people of Ireland. Significant animal motifs of the Celts, like sacred white horses, appear again and again.

In addition to the spoken legends told by her matrons, the literary arts of Aesop, Beatrix Potter, Jonathan Swift, Lewis Carroll, and Aldous Huxley were all influential on Carrington during her formative years. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* made a cameo in Carrington's most anthologized short story and curator Seán Kissane believes her painting *The Giantess* was greatly influenced by the fictional land Lilliput of which Gulliver travelled.¹ Animal imagery and fantastic beasts are present in some—if not all—works from each of the above authors. Non-human creatures are mysterious enough that imaginative narratives are limitless, but of a similar enough species to be understood as a relatable, metaphorical mechanism.

Art critic John Berger explains in *About Seeing* how animals were the first example of existential dualism: animals were both subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and*

¹ Seán Kissane, "The Celtic Surrealist," in *Leonora Carrington* (Dublin: Distributed Art Publishers, 2013), 61.

sacrificed. Man distinguished himself from the other only by the capacity for symbolic thought, and the first symbols that humans used in ancient texts and drawings were depictions of animals. Animals first entered human imagination as messengers or guides, and as symbols; animals served to assign logic or create meaning for moments and events that appeared devoid of reason.² This practice, used to help interpret the world, has been adopted by many different cultures across thousands of years. The Ancient Greeks used twelve animals to represent each hour of the day. In Egyptian mythology, the Great Serpent Apep chases the sun god, Ra, across the sky every day, leading us from day to night. This use of animal imagery to create meaning can also be witnessed in literary form. Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare teaches the reader how to deal with complex circumstantial issues in a form even children can grasp. Animals are gifted with a mysterious power to which humans have always been eager to assign reason. Through the medium of storytelling, creatures guide us through the hours, the days, and metaphorical moral crises. It is the duality of animals of the familiar and the curious that provide humans with introspection they need with the distance they desire, and Carrington's beasts live along the edges of familiar and fantastical.

The ancient Celtic world-view that Carrington came to know through the stories she was told is one of unity – lands, animals, people, and divinities are interdependent. An animal represents certain energies of the natural world and acts as a bridge between the human world and the Underworld, and a goddess is a higher entity containing those same forces of that designated totem animal. In the cosmology of this natural and spiritual conglomerate, the animals' energies and attributes are foundational while the

² John Berger, *About Seeing* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 4-7.

associated deities provide the knowledge and wisdom required to mediate those energies.³ The role of animals is thus both secularly and sacredly vital.

Carrington's early proclivity for a world defined by imagination lead her to pursue art as a career, but this choice was not well-received by her family. As a wealthy textile tycoon and business investor, Carrington's father demanded that his only daughter embrace her upper-class family obligations by abandoning her notions of art and independence and commit to a suitable marriage.⁴ After forcibly going through with the high-society rite-of-passage of debuting her bachelorette status, she attended Amédée Ozenfant's school of Purism in London and never visited her father again.

Later Life

Carrington was a multi-disciplined individual whose interests included alchemy, the psyche, and feminism. Though born in England, she settled in Mexico in 1942 and is considered by art historians to be a Mexican artist. The crux of her career began in the looming shadow of World War II when she was placed in a psychiatric clinic⁵ and felt both her personal life and the good of the world were crumbling. Through satirical imagery, Carrington juxtaposed her personal experiences with the social constructs and political chaos of this era. The written and painted works she created prior to and at the beginning of her life in Mexico provide a balance of reality and fantasy, the physical and the spiritual, as well as the macabre and the whimsical.

³ R.J. Stewart, *Celtic Gods and Goddesses* (London: Blandford Press, 1990), 50.

⁴ Marina Warner, introduction to *Down Below*, writer Leonora Carrington (New York: New York Review Books), xv-xviii.

⁵ Multiple research resources (including her memoir) have provided that Leonora Carrington was under the care of Drs. Mariano and Luis Morales in Santander, Spain yet do not give the name of the institution. Vintage promotional materials for one Peña-Castillo found through online auction site [todocoleccion](http://todocoleccion.com) might be the sanatorium in which Carrington stayed.

Innumerable beliefs, practices, and interests intertwined in her life and art. A single work could be a collection of one or more of these frequent inspirations: Zen Buddhism, Islamic philosophy, Celtic legend, ancient Egyptian mysticism, Renaissance fresco, fairytales, and the influence of both Pieter Breughel and Hieronymus Bosch.⁶ To explore and better understand the complexities of her imagery, it is important to understand the myths, archetypes, and symbology represented therein. Across all discourses present, a constant and essential element is that of the animal.

Powerful women and androgynous figures also frequently inhabit Carrington's created worlds, juxtaposing how her real world was dominated by the patriarchy. Feminist and surrealist scholar Whitney Chadwick said that Carrington's lifelong fight for women's rights visibly originated during the height of Carrington's personal crises.⁷ It is during this decade (1937-1947) when she made everyday scenes that blurred boundaries of real and magical, of man and other.

Even prior to her involvement with the surrealists, Carrington embraced the versatility of creatures and demonstrated the animalistic nature of humans by pairing beast and human together in both paint and words, sometimes by fusing the two beings into one unified whole. During the nineteen-thirties and forties other women artists found similar ways to challenge the world's antiquated notions of gender constructs. The women of the surrealist movement began to reconstruct their identities through self-portraits that represent how they see rather than how they appear.⁸ Chadwick calls this

⁶ Edward J. Sullivan, *La Mujer En México/Women in Mexico* (México, D.F.: Fundación Cultural Televisa, 1990), LXIX.

⁷ Whitney Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness," *Womans Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (1986): doi:10.2307/1358235.

⁸ Tere Arcq, "In the Land of Convulsive Beauty: Mexico," in *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States* (Prestel USA, 2012), 83.

interweaving of self and other as a means to relocate sources of feminine subjectivity “self-othering.”⁹ Argentinian artist Leonor Fini, for example, invoked the refined dominance of the Egyptian deities by frequently rendering herself as the powerful Sphinx. Mexican artist Frida Kahlo transformed herself in portraits into, among other things, a deer and her masculine persona. Kahlo’s unflinching commentary vis-à-vis hybrid and androgynous self-portraiture declared her resilience and demonstrated she would not let society determine who she was and certainly not how she was portrayed.

Carrington was treated as a wild-child even in the hands of her guardians at the sanatorium. Upon entry to Dr. Morales’ Santander insane asylum in 1940, she “fought like a tigress”¹⁰ and was treated as such - they tied down with leather straps and prefaced any mercy with the demeaning phrase, “Will you be a good girl?”¹¹ As Jungian psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés says, it is no coincidence that wild animals and “wild” women have similar reputations as they share related instinctual archetypes. Wolves, coyotes, and other wild creatures, like women, are stereotyped as ungracious, innately dangerous, and ravenous. Carrington fits the Wild Woman archetype as defined by Estés. *Wild* is used here in the original sense describing a life lived naturally in which a being has innate integrity, healthy boundaries, and wisdom.¹²

A Carrington Bestiary

⁹ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 13.

¹⁰ Leonora Carrington, *Down Below* (New York: New York Review Books, 2017), 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

¹² Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Woman Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 7.

A Bestiary is a book about beasts written as factual commentary on the animal kingdom that was popularized in the Middle Ages. These books of natural history were enchantingly illustrated and stimulated the imaginations of its viewers. Ancient naturalists like Aristotle, Herodotus, and Pliny the Elder documented personal observations and tales they believed to be true of animals. These were summarized by the early, anonymous Christian authors of bestiaries who added moral and religious lessons to their illuminated manuscripts. Bestiaries have been used throughout history to define animals in contexts to certain religion, the cosmos, and life itself.

Imagined animals, mythological creatures, ghostly figures, ancient goddesses, monsters, human-animal hybrids, and common pets would prove to cross all dimensions of Carrington's work. Each beast, mythical being, and anthropomorphized object present in her works has its own source of inspiration or symbolic meaning. When these symbols unite on canvas it can be difficult to determine the overarching theme. Because her early paintings and stories are vastly varied in content and interpretations, combining the creatures into a bestiary format allows for a structured analysis. A bestiary is necessary to navigate Carrington's labyrinth of art and story, teeming with seemingly familiar yet jarringly unusual creatures and characters. Her beasts can be interpreted in the same way animals in medieval bestiaries were used as metaphors. As she grappled with fears both real and imagined after being displaced by the war, Carrington searched for answers to her own life; the animals in her creations guided her through the hours, the days, and moral crises.

The *Alexandrian Physiologus* (c. 2nd century AD) is the ancestor of all bestiaries.¹³ Later translated into many vernacular languages, the *Physiologus* became widely available in the West as a source of “divine knowledge through earthly correspondences.”¹⁴ The *Ashmole Bestiary* from early 13th century England is a Christian tome in which the animals are illustrated and, like the *Physiologus*, theologized in biblically inspired tales of morality.¹⁵ Inspired by the illuminated manuscripts of yore, Caspar Henderson published *The Book of Barely Imagined Beings: A 21st Century Bestiary* in 2012. Each of these manuscripts, though centuries apart, were created with the same purpose: to define the complex mysteries of the abundant unknown. Henderson explains in the introduction of *The Book of Imagined Beings*:



Figure 2: Conrad Gessner, *The Camelopard*, woodcut from *Animal Book*, 1486

But there is more to bestiaries than this. Along with zany pictures, bizarre zoology and religious parables, they contain gems of acute observation: attempts to understand and convey how things actually are. Undaunted by (and unaware of) the limits of the knowledge of their time, they celebrate the beauty of being and of beings.¹⁶

¹³ Guy R. Mermier, “The Romanian Bestiary: An English Translation and Commentary on the Ancient “Physiologus” Tradition,” *Mediterranean Studies* 13 (2004): 19-20, accessed June 12, 2019, <https://jstor.org/stable/41166963>.

¹⁴ Anna Wilson, “Sexing the Hyena: Intraspecies Readings of the Female Phallus,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2003): 760, accessed April 7, 2019, doi:10.1086/345320.

¹⁵ Debra Hassig, “Beauty in the Beasts: A Study of Medieval Aesthetics,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 19-20 (1990): 138, accessed June 12, 2019, doi:10.1086/resvn1ms20166830.

¹⁶ Caspar Henderson, *The Book of Barely Imagined Beings: A 21st Century Bestiary* (Chicago: Univesitry of Chicago Press, 2013), xi.

The beings created by Leonora Carrington are, like in ancient and medieval bestiaries, symbols used to understand the world and define her place within it.

CHAPTER I

BESTIARY OF THE DAWN HORSE

So like many women before and after me, I lived my life as a disguised criatura ... but my fabulous tail often fell below my hemline, and my ears twitched until my hat pitched... – Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*



Figure 3: Leonora Carrington, *Inn of the Dawn Horse*, c. 1937-1938, 65 cm × 81.2 cm

***Inn of the Dawn Horse* and “The Debutante”**

Inn of the Dawn Horse (alternatively, *Self-portrait*), c. 1937-1938 [fig. 3], is one of Carrington’s most notable works. The figure of Carrington, the beasts, and the chair

relay a narrative of dueling concepts: freedom and imprisonment, lady-like and rebellious, feminine and masculine.

At the center of the painting are a seated Carrington and a creature typically referred to by scholars¹⁷ as a striped hyena (“Debutante”, a story written by the artist the same year as this painting, features a hyena as the main character.) The room in which they are confined is of minimal adornment. Behind the hyena-like figure is a glassless window, flanked by canary-yellow curtains. Through the window is a white stallion, galloping away into a bright blue and green landscape. On the perpendicular wall floats a white rocking horse, nose pointing in the same direction as the stallion as if prepared to escape from where it has been corralled. The corner of the room converges just below the exact center of the picture plane. Hovering at the same apex is Carrington’s hand, held in a unique gesture akin to a puppeteer maneuvering invisible strings.

Carrington’s stories and paintings are semi-autobiographical. At the center of one’s psyche is what Jung refers to as the Self, often symbolized as an animal. Both Self and animal are central to their respective surrounding natures for the *cosmos of Self* include dreams, thoughts, fears of the host and the *cosmos of the animal* include food, home building materials, and definite territories. These microcosms are woven into the macrocosms of the whole world.¹⁸ Mixed with the matriarchical consciousness of Carrington’s writing, her use of women characters with strong agency set her apart from the male surrealists who were also “peeling back the curtain” of their inner psyche.¹⁹

¹⁷ Such as Aberth and Warner.

¹⁸ Marie-Louise von Franz, “The Process of Individuation,” in *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl G. Jung (Dell Publishing, 1964), 220.

¹⁹ Mara R. Witzling, *Voicing Our Visions: Writings by Women Artists*, (London: Womens Press, 1992), 307.

The formula for a typical Carrington tale centers around a young girl who unexpectedly meets a friend or foe and soon thereafter experiences gruesome or peculiar events. At the core of these short, dark fantasies is an outsider boundlessly traveling and transforming to match their new environment. This is not unlike Carrington's own life. For example, after she was forced by her father to debut at King George V's court, she voyaged to London to study art under the tutelage of Amédée Ozenfant as his first student. Still refusing to conform to the life of familial duties, she traveled next to Paris where began a whirl-wind romance with Max Ernst, twenty-six years her senior. This unexpected companionship lasted for two years, abruptly ending when he was arrested by the German Nazi military as an enemy alien and interred at Les Milles.²⁰ Fearing for her own life during this Nazi invasion of France, Carrington sold the home she shared with Ernst for a bottle of brandy²¹ and fled the country in a friend's Fiat. These series of events made lasting impressions and preluded a life of gruesome, absurd, and magical adventures.

The magic and myth of *Inn of the Dawn Horse* is almost palpable – an invisible energy vibrates through the central figure's outstretched index finger and escapes through her electric hair. Underneath the playful façade of the mystical nursery is darkness and satire. Jungian archetypes, Celtic mythology, and ancient alchemical texts provide a deeper read of the varied elements present.

Bestiary

²⁰ Warner, introduction to *Down Below*, xix.

²¹ Dawn Ades, *The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Evolution in Art*, (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2011), 84.

Anthropomorphic Chair

In contrast to the stark surroundings, the chair on which Carrington sits is decorated with highly saturated magenta cushions and cerulean blue frame. Upon closer inspection, the ornamentation of the chair's arms and legs are just that – humanoid arms and legs. By personifying the chair, the paralyzing imprisonment of the beings within the room is accentuated.

The composition conveys how boxed in by society, family, and politics she feels. By granting otherwise sedentary piece of furniture life speaks of Carrington's agency as creator. Susan Aberth takes special note of the "living furniture" in this and later work by Carrington. Of the present piece she assesses the sexual nature of the chair and the power Carrington draws from her seated position within, "The

carved armrest is hand-like, mirroring the figure's left hand, while the legs terminate in small, carved boots like the real ones in close proximity ... The opposite of a piece of ladylike bedroom furniture, it mocks decorum like an open red mouth or a protruding tongue. Taking things a step further, the red seat atop the skirted bottom of the chair could be viewed as the artist's genital doppelgänger. Enthroned within the chair's vaginal centre, Carrington announces and owns her newly found sexual power."²²



Figure 4: Hermann Landshoff, *Leonora Carrington with Andre Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst in New York City, 1942*

²² Susan Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 2018), 31-32.

Horses: white, rocking, and dawn

Horses are often used in Carrington's work and have been interpreted as a variety of things; some art historians, like Chadwick, equate the horse's presence in Carrington's and her lover, Ernst's, work to be a representation their sexual relationship for the horse has long been a symbol of fecundity.²³ Others, like Susan Rubin Suleiman, theorize that Carrington's use of horses is a testament to her habitual social rebellion mirrored by the spirit of wild horses.²⁴ Love of horse riding and appreciation of nature was something she and her mother shared; the horse was one link to her aristocratic upbringing she never rebelled.²⁵

Carrington frequently painted herself as a horse or a horse as her and the horse in itself thus became her totem or alter-ego. The term "totem" is a word referring to one's animal counterpart. Claude Levi-Strauss explained that man originally felt identical to all those like him (including animals) but then came to acquire the capacity to distinguish *himself* as he distinguishes *them*. Differentiating species from one another was a conceptual tool to support social differentiation.²⁶ A contemporary of Carrington, Austrian-born Mexican artist Wolfgang Paalen defined "totemism" as "corresponds to a certain development stage or archaic mentality." Paalen's theory was an assemblage of ideas from surrealist manifestos, mythology, Freudian psychology, anthropology, and

²³ Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness," 38.

²⁴ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 104-105.

²⁵ Ibid, 108.

²⁶ Berger, *About Seeing*, 7.

ethnography.²⁷ In using the horse, Carrington created a powerful metaphor that proclaimed she shall not abide by man's constructs if she does not want to.

White Horse

The white horse is an ode to the Irish folktales associated with Carrington's maternal lineage. Sacred images of horses are abundant throughout Celtic art and artifacts, from earthwork hill figures to Iron Age coins. Celtic cults held the horse in high reverence coveting its qualities of speed, beauty, and sexual prowess. Horse worship has persisted from the earliest nomadic stages of proto-Celtic tribal culture²⁸: the sacred white horse of a Celtic tribe of Tuatha de Danaan is an icon of creative spirit;²⁹ Epona, the most famous horse deity of the Celts, is the fertility goddess as well as the patroness of cavalry officers;³⁰ and Rhiannon, a major figure in medieval Welsh tales who may be a rendition of the Celtic deity Rigantona of which her name appears to be derived. The Tuatha De Danaan (or, the fairy Children of the Great Mother Dana³¹), Epona, and Rhiannon are connected to the divine female; Celtic legends oft hold goddesses to a higher reverence than their male counter parts.³² Carrington's use of the white horse is not simply for her equestrian obsession, but for the strong empowerment she recognized in her mother and the tales she told.

²⁷ Colin Browne, "Scavengers of Paradise," in *The Colour of My Dreams: The Surrealist Revolution in Art*, ed. Dawn Ades (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery 201, no. 1, 2011), 255-256.

²⁸ Stewart, *Celtic Gods and Goddesses*, 24.

²⁹ Witzling, *Voicing Our Visions: Writings by Women Artists*, 309.

³⁰ *The Celts*, Sacred Symbols (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 42.

³¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 305.

³² Stewart, *Celtic Gods and Goddesses*, 66.

One of Carrington's short stories, "The Oval Lady", will be discussed at length in the next chapter, but it is pertinent to bring up now in relation to the white horse and horse deity Rhiannon. Though the white horse of *Inn of the Dawn Horse* is a positive representation of the strength and persistence associated with Celtic goddesses, it is just as important to emphasize what events they overcame. The main character, Lucretia, had just transformed herself into a white horse and was causing a ruckus with her friends in the toy room. From the doorway an old woman interrupted the fun with a furious command to stop at once. When Lucretia disobeyed, the old woman jumped on Lucretia's back and shoved a bit into her mouth. She forcefully led them all to Lucretia's father for punishment. The young woman had repeatedly disobeyed her father by "playing" horses. Her childish and bestial behavior warranted the destruction of her dearest rocking horse by the hands of her father. The legendary Rhiannon was punished for refusing to provide her husband with an heir. The claim is that she is less than human, as much mare as she is woman, so he turns her into a white horse.³³ Though Lucretia is transformed into a white horse by her own will, the animal form and motif of the human-horse behavior being controlled at the hands of men is the same. Lucretia was corralled with bit in mouth to her father and Rhiannon was treated as a horse by the entire court – even suggestively being mounted.

Rocking Horse

In addition to the sparse enclosure and forcibly inhabited chair, further highlighting a sense of captivity, is the contrast of the rocking horse, bound to the wall,

³³ Jessica Hemming, "Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in "Pwyll"," *Western Folklore* 57, no. 1 (1998): 21, accessed April 11, 2019, doi:10.2307/1500247.

against its living counter-part which is free to roam beyond the walls. As a lonely child, Carrington cultivated an imaginative relationship with a rocking horse in her nursery. The rocking horse is a motif of her personal story that consistently reappears in her written and painted works.³⁴

Similar to the creative freedom the surrealists admired from the “uncivilized” minds of indigenous people, the innocence of a childlike mind was championed. Carrington was the embodiment of *femme enfant*, or, “woman-child”. This is the surrealists’ term fondly referring to the ideal muse - woman - as the irrational and innocent object.³⁵ Carrington was considered a wild-child and a rebel; she was repeatedly expelled from schools and had a flare for disruptive public theatrics. Breton wrote of one such tantalizing acts in the introduction of *Anthology of Black Humour*: At an important dinner, Carrington lathered her feet with the mustard served at the restaurant and the reason she provided onlookers was simply her feet were sore.³⁶

The appearance of a toy from her childhood, in this instance, refers to the degrading title *femme enfant*. Being the surrealists’ coveted woman-child, whose companionship unlocked the creativity from their unconscious, prevented Carrington from freeing her own unbridled potential.

Dawn Horse

³⁴ Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness," 38.

³⁵ Yaowen Zhang, "A SURREALIST HOMECOMING: AN INVESTIGATION OF CORPOREAL METAMORPHOSIS IN LEONORA CARRINGTON'S DOWN BELOW" (Master's thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2018), 1.

³⁶ Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 30.

Generally referred to as a hyena, the beast in the center of the painting could be the titular *Dawn Horse*. A dawn horse, or *eohippus*, is the first equine species. Even if the central creature is not an *eohippus*, the title alone could allude to Carrington's own evolution from *femme-enfant* to *femme-sorciere*.

Hyena

Carrington parodied her own experience as a debutante in "The Debutante." In her mythical retelling, instead of the debutante being used as a pawn in the aristocratic game of marriage, she is the player.³⁷ This, Carrington's most anthologized story, was written the same time *Inn of the*



Figure 5: Bodleian Library, MS. Ashmole 1511, Folio 17v

Dawn Horse was painted. The presence of the hyena-like figure may be an illustrated recommendation for the viewer to turn to "The Debutante." The connection of hyena from the tale brings a sense of feminine intelligence and agency to the painting.

A young debutante who prefers animals to children her own age befriends a hyena from the zoo. On the morning of a dreaded dinner orchestrated in the girl's honor, she invites the hyena to take her place at the fancy party. To hide the fur of the attendee, the girl and hyena conspired to kill the maid and use her face as a mask. While the debutante took refuge in reading *Gulliver's Travels*, the hyena dined with the upper echelon. The

³⁷ Sullivan, *La Mujer En México/Women in Mexico*, lxix.

scent of the animal gave the game away – when the mother of the debutante commented on the vulgar smell, the hyena abruptly yelled, “Well I don’t eat cakes!”, ate the maid’s face off of its own, and leapt out the window.

“Premodern representations of the hyena came to the West originally from three main sources: Aristotle, Pliny, and the *Physiologus*; ideas in the latter became the basis for the hyena that recurs in medieval bestiaries, other Christian texts, and, gradually, the metaphor of the everyday.”³⁸ The *Physiologus* claims the hyena is double sexed, able to alternate between male and female, and are thus unclean creatures. The Christian West then associated the hyena with sexual excess and aberration.³⁹ Christian interpretation of the “unclean” hyena equates roughly to “if one does not obey the laws of gender, they also defy the laws of nature and the divine.”⁴⁰ This comparison to hyena or other monstrous beast to defiant women has problematically become part of the Western literary and political canon.

Romanticism specialist Alan Bewell has written at length about the hyena as portrayed by the colonial British authors and poets of whose works Carrington had undoubtedly read. Bewell defines the hyena as an “unsublime, queer animal that disturbs and unsettles fundamental categories of nature, politics, gender, and sexuality.”⁴¹ The inherent duplicity of this animal is likened to the other predatory, mostly female “mimics” in classical literature, such as sirens and lamia, whose purpose is to destroy men. The mimicry ability was documented in medieval bestiaries saying the hyena is the

³⁸ Wilson, “Sexing the Hyena: Intraspecies Readings of the Female Phallus,” 758.

³⁹ Ibid, 760.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 760.

⁴¹ Alan Bewell, “Hyena Trouble,” *Studies in Romanticism* 53, no. 3 (2014): 370, accessed April 7, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24247279>

creature that walks around houses at night to study the tone of voice for imitation purpose.⁴²

The medieval tendency to compare masculine women (or rather, those who do not conform to conservative societal restrictions) to dangerous beast persisted through the eighteenth century when Horace Walpole infamously called Mary Wollstonecraft a hyena in petticoats, insinuating that she, an educated woman whom did not know her gender-place, was a monster merely disguised as a lady.⁴³ Carrington's satirical tale of the debutante and the hyena cleverly use the guise of the intelligent yet dangerous beast as lady to mock the absurd, centuries old tales of lady masked as beast. The debutante used the hyena to infiltrate an upper-class soiree and humorously proves how powerful and effective women can be. Reversing the politically charged trope could strengthen the fear men have of women, but the fairy tale quality emphasizes the wit and agency of one girl against a party of foolish traditionalists.

Medieval bestiaries cast the hyena as an animal of lust and gluttony for unclean things.⁴⁴ Suleiman stated that in her 1990 interview with the artist Carrington refused to provide reasoning for choosing to depict a hyena or other details about the painting answering in short phrases such as, "It's a good painting. Period," and "Well, that's what I did."⁴⁵ In an interview nine years later Carrington said, "I'm like a hyena, I get into the garbage cans. I have an insatiable curiosity."⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid, 371.

⁴³ Ibid, 377-381.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 372.

⁴⁵ Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature*, 95.

⁴⁶ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, 32.

The symbolism of hyenas in the West speak of Christian immorality but the hyena of Eastern codices tell of the creature's magical attributes. While studying the species in Rajasthan, India, wildlife biologist Priya Singh met villagers who spoke of legends in which witches ride the backs of hyenas and when their hyenas come across a carcass and dine on the flesh [fig. 5], the witch will consume the soul of the dead. In parts of the Middle East, similar misconceptions exist like believing that a striped hyena can put a spell on people before dragging them back to a cave and eating them alive.⁴⁷ The pairing of woman and a striped hyena in *Inn of the Dawn Horse* allows a further argument for Carrington being depicted as a sorceress.

Sorceress

Carrington's interest in magic began with the ancient and magical race of the *Sidhe* as told in Irish fairy tales. In a school book she wrote of the witches from *Macbeth*, fascinated by the way the "weird sisters" asserted themselves, taking advantage of other's weaknesses for their own gain. She did not forget the history of her hometown, "I, for example, come from a town, Lancaster, where witches were burned. I am sure they were not burned for their conditions as witches... but for political reasons and for vengeance."

⁴⁸ Her interests in alchemy and the occult was piqued during her time studying with Ozenfant who placed great emphasis on the chemistry of art materials.⁴⁹ Surrealist

⁴⁷ Jason Bittel, "Stripped Hyenas Don't Have Magical Powers. But Their Disappearing Act Is for Real.," NRDC, January 24, 2018, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.nrdc.org/onearth/striped-hyenas-dont-have-magical-powers-their-disappearing-act-real>.

⁴⁸ Tere Arcq, "A World Made of Magic," in *Leonora Carrington* (Dublin: Distributed Art Publishers, 2013), 21-22.

⁴⁹ M. E. Warlick, "Leonora Carrington's Esoteric Symbolism and Their Sources," *Studia Hermetica Journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 59, accessed July 26, 2019, <https://ojs.studiahermetica.com/index.php/SHJ/article/view/45>.

primitivism evolved between *Minotaure* and *VVV* – the notion of magic and its role in the artist’s life became more important as effecting change and transforming the world was a central concern of the surrealists. In a similar vein of Novalis’s poet-magician, the artist-magician was developed.⁵⁰ Carrington spent over a month studying witchcraft and the arts of the *curandero* during the time she lived with the Chiapas natives in the Maya highlands as she fully embraced hermetic esoteric practices.⁵¹

Inn of the Dawn Horse, although created prior to her increasingly magic-infused work, contain magical elements. The uncharacteristically domestic hyena, the horse and it’s double, and the sparse but vibrant objects to which our eyes are drawn should not detract from the self-portrait of Leonora – especially the gesture of her right hand.

The gesture the figure of Carrington is making with her hands appears to be the Neapolitan *mano cornuta*, or, the horned hand. Historically, Christians and pagans alike used this gesture for superstitious reasons. In Italy, horns were once widely believed to be an object that dispels evil.

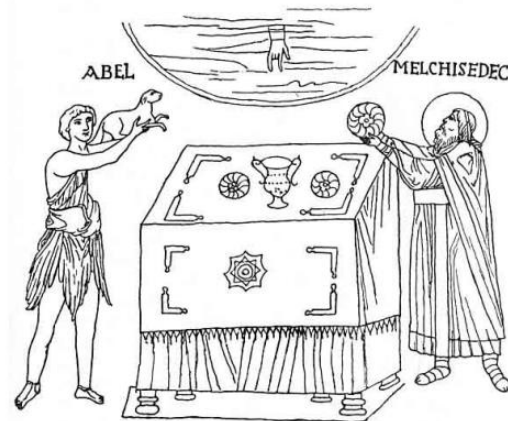


Figure 6: *San Vitale - Abel and Melchizedek Sacrificing*, 6th C.

When a real horn was not readily available

in a time of need, mimicking the shape of horns with one’s hand sufficed. The gesture as seen in the mosaics in Ravenna [fig. 6] denote sacerdotal rank.⁵² Carrington’s loose rendition of the horned hand can imply one or both of the following: the evil eye (an

⁵⁰ Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of Andre Breton* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 144.

⁵¹ Sullivan, *La Mujer En México/Women in Mexico*, lxix.

⁵² Ibid, 206-215.

amulet or gesture that wards against evil) is meant to protect her against the viewer she and the striped creature are meeting the gaze of; or it is heralding her divine, magical abilities.

Aberth writes of a third possibility in *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy, and Art*: Because Carrington's hand is pointing toward the hyena in the "age-old sign of malediction," it binds woman and beast together, transforming the pair into a witch and her familiar.⁵³

Mysticism was a form of female knowledge in the Middle Ages. This knowledge went beyond book learning – it enabled expressions of powerful states of feeling. While women embraced their inherent ability of emotional expression, it also legitimized the church's separation of male from female. Visionary Hildegard of Bingen (German, seventeenth-century), for example, was excluded from preaching and administration of the sacraments.⁵⁴ The church believed her gender to be more vulnerable than that of the rational male, allowing, in addition to heavenly visions, demonic assaults.⁵⁵

Surrealist women who demonstrate their ability to instinctively access and express their thoughts, dreams, and visions, like in the middle ages, were treated as a mystical source to be both encouraged yet subdued. Hildegard of Bingen for example relayed her visions through the small window of her anchorite cell to a scribe (a man) who then shared the visions to the church. As a preface to Carrington's first edition of her story "The House of Fear", Ernst refers to Carrington as his "Bride of the Wind" thus:

⁵³ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, 33.

⁵⁴ Whitney Chadwick. "Leonora Carrington: Visual Narrative in Contemporary Mexican Art," in *A Woman's Gaze: Latin American Women Artists*, (Ed. by Marjorie Agosín, 97-109, Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1998), 107.

⁵⁵ Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The Strange Case of Ermine D Reims (c. 1347-1396): A Medieval Woman between Demons and Saints," *Speculum* 85, no. 2 (April 2010): 325, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://jstor.org/stable/27866846>.

Who is the Bride of the Wind? Does she know how
to read? How to write French without errors? She is
warmed by her intense life, by her mystery, by her poetry.
She has read nothing, but she had drunk everything.

By introducing Carrington as a mysterious novice, Ernst, in true misogynist fashion, both
compliments and belittles his female partner.

Artist Octavio Paz called Carrington “the bewitched witch, insensitive to social
morality, to aesthetics and price.”⁵⁶ Breton identified her as Michelet’s witch for she
“possessed the womanly gifts of illuminism of lucid madness” as well as “the sublime
power of solitary conception.”⁵⁷ Their comments reflect the centuries-old identification
of brilliant women as witches. However, instead of burning them at the stake as in the
trials of Lancashire of 1612, men of the surrealist group aspired to perceive the world the
same way women do. It does not erase the misogyny entirely: Carrington (and other
occult inspired artists like Fini and Varo) is still categorized as Other.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Angélica Abellera, “Leonora Carrington: Discovering Diverging Worlds,” *Voices of Mexico*, 40,
accessed July 26, 2019, <https://revistascisan.unam.mx/Voices/pdfs/5306.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of
Andre Breton*, 135.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 149.

CHAPTER II

THE OVAL BESTIARY

When people are buried, it's for rebirth. That's the origin of the burial idea. You put someone back into the womb of mother earth for rebirth. – Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*



Figure 7: Leonora Carrington, *The Oval Lady* (alternatively titled *Green Tea*), 1942, 61 x 76 cm.

***The Oval Lady* and “The Oval Lady” & “Monsieur Cyril de Guindre”**

La Dame Ovale (*The Oval Lady*) is the title of both a short story Carrington wrote in 1938 and the partial title of a painting completed in 1942. Both the painting and the short story are meditations on transformation, penance, death, and rebirth.

Green Tea, or, *The Oval Lady* as will be referred to here, is a verdant landscape of a mostly enclosed hill speckled with unusually shaped topiaries. A fountain attended by three ghostly figures at the base of the hill acts as the vanishing point. Along the bottom of the canvas is a sliver of an underground scene. Monochromatic greens shroud the three bats, the three cocooned human figures, and the two birds and their nest full of eggs. Vein-like roots separate the three groups. Despite the small portion of the canvas dedicated to the cut-away view of the underground, the dark visages are foundational elements to the interpretation of the image as one of occult ritual birth and death practices.

The right middle foreground is occupied by the Oval Lady, constricted by a full body wrap, akin to that of a mummy. To the left of her are four stags inside an egg-shaped cauldron, stabilized by two hairy-legged and hooved feet. On the right is a barking dog with bulbous teats. The dog's companion is small white horse. The two trees to which the dog and horse are tied appear to grow from their another's tails.

Just as "The Debutante" and *Inn of the Dawn Horse* are visually connected through the hyena, the wrapped figure in *The Oval Lady* leads us to not one, but two of Carrington's short stories: "The Oval Lady" (1937-1938) and "Monsieur Cyril de Guindre" (1937-1940.) Geometry and numbers scatter throughout "The Oval Lady" but both tales deal with familial conflict and death.

"The Oval Lady" is told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator whom is drawn into a stately home by the visage of a pale figure. The ten-feet-tall sixteen-year-old "oval lady," Lucretia, standing at the window, entranced the narrator. After passing the window seven times and noticing the only thing that moved was the pheasant feather

in Lucretia's hair, the narrator enters. Matching the oblong stature of the lady were the elongated furniture; chairs were twice as tall as ordinary chairs, and the plates were oval instead of round.⁵⁹

Lucretia is on a hunger strike against her father. She calls him a bastard and a pig and claims she wants to die just to annoy him. She leads the uninvited guest to a nursery room full of broken toys explaining that the one-hundred-year-old rocking horse, frozen mid-gallop, is her favorite because, "he loathes father."⁶⁰ Tarter, the wooden horse, mysteriously rocked on his own.

From the nursery window a magpie blew in with the snow and flew around the room three times. The bird, Matilda, spoke with a witch's screech and had a forked tongue, courtesy of a six-year-old Lucretia. Lucretia suggested they play and pretend to be horses. She leapt into the snowy mound that had covered Tarter. The snow transformed her into a white horse.

The old gentleman is described as having looked more like a geometric figure than a person.⁶¹ According to him it had been three years and three days since he forbade Lucretia to play at horses and this was now the seventh time she defied his rule. Seven being the last number in their family, this meant the most severe punishment was required: Tartar must be burned.

Thibaut Lastre came to tea in Cyril's "intensely green" garden. Thibaut, who had "golden skin of a child's well-preserved corpse,"⁶² demanded information about the "nymph" he saw beside the lake. Cyril explained how the young girl might be his

⁵⁹ Leonora Carrington, *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington* (Dorothy, 2017), 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 10.

⁶¹ Ibid, 13.

⁶² Ibid, 78.

daughter, “Twenty years ago I committed the indiscretion of taking a woman. Moreover, I married her. She was extremely tiring, an uncivilized creature, painfully lacking in delicacy. Lacking as her wont, she became pregnant six years after we were married. The grossness of her physique during those nine months made me feel quite ill. I was obliged, my dear Thibaut, to stay in bed several weeks after her daughter’s birth. I suffered greatly, imagining myself pregnant.”⁶³

Cyril, his face as “white as an albino orchid,” dressed in an angora gown, prepared to find the girl at the lake. On assessing his reflection in the mirror he laughed, “Precious mummy. Who knows? Won’t you have fun afterall?”⁶⁴ His daughter, Panthilde, and her tutor, the Abbott, entered the home of monsieur de Guindre before he exited. What follows is an obscure account of poisoning or hypnosis which lulls Cyril into a sickening sleep.

Carrington painted *The Oval Lady* during the same time she was writing the account of her time in the asylum. This work combines aspects of “The Oval Lady” and “Monsieur Cyril de Guindre,” alchemical equipment, and symbols from Egyptian and Celtic mythology to express her realization of rebirth.

Bestiary

Oval Lady

The wrapped figure is restricted in a tightly wound shroud or straight-jacket. This may be the tall, pale Oval Lady from “The Oval Lady” as the title might suggest, or it could be the titular character of “Monsieur Cyril de Guindre.” By description in the tale

⁶³ Ibid, 79.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 82.

the white faced, mummily dressed Cyril matches the image. The identity does not actually matter, for the person is ultimately a manifestation of Carrington's experience when she was bound up in the asylum in Santander, Spain. Associating a straight-jacket to the mental asylum is a fair assumption but given the various symbols of death and rebirth across the entirety of the painting, it will here be interpreted as a death shroud – specifically that of the ancient Egyptians. Carrington said, "After the experience of Down Below, I changed. Dramatically. It was very much like having been dead."⁶⁵

During her time at Dr. Morale's sanatorium she was mostly confined to her bed by leather straps in Villa Covadonga of which she came to refer to as Egypt. She believed the tortures she succumbed to there were a means to purify her in order to attain entrance to Villa Abajo – the hotel-like pavilion without bars on its windows. On a map of the asylum drawn by Carrington [*fig. 8*], the radiography house where she underwent her Cardiazol treatments is represented by a coffin that contains a two-headed person.⁶⁶ Learning of Villa Abajo, or Down Below, she considered it Paradise. She consciously approached plans to be transferred from the confining Egypt to the liberating Paradise with an esoteric logic – alchemical calculations combined with Christian faith and mysticism.⁶⁷

I knew that by closing my eyes, I could avoid the
advent of the most unbearable pain: the stare of others.
Therefore, I would keep them closed for a very, very long
time at a stretch. This was my expiation for my exile from
the rest of the world: this was the sign for my flight from
Covadonga (which for me was Egypt) and of my return
Down Below (Jerusalem), where I was destined to bring

⁶⁵ Chadwick. "Leonora Carrington: Visual Narrative in Contemporary Mexican Art," 100.

⁶⁶ Kristoffer Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation: Symbolic Death and Rebirth in Little Francis and Down Below," *Correspondences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55, accessed April 7, 2019, correspondencesjournal.com.

⁶⁷ Carrington, *Down Below*, 44.

Knowledge; I had spent too much time putting up with the solitude of my own knowledge.⁶⁸

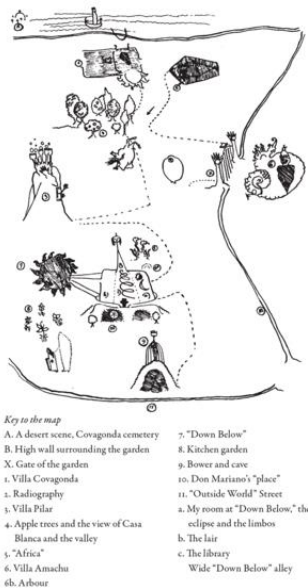


Figure 8: Leonora Carrington, Map of Down Below, c. 1941

At a young age, Carrington's first trip seeing the mummies at the British Museum had a profound effect on her;⁶⁹ references to ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures are drawn on with more emphasis in her later work.⁷⁰ In "Monsieur Cyril de Guindre" Cyril refers to himself as a mummy after his pale body is ceremoniously bathed in rose water, doused in peacock green powder, and applied opium essence behind his ears.⁷¹ The ritual

preparations of Egyptian corpses was done with similar method with sacred unguents to preserve beauty and

prevent or mask decay. The mummification was a means to insure one's body to be preserved for their birth into the afterlife. For the Egyptians, as well as many other cultures Carrington was fond of learning about, death was not the end of one's life but the beginning of another.

Anthropomorphic Cauldron

In alchemy, the athanor, or "oven" is where, through a series of purification, coagulation, calcination, and further, a metal can be transmuted into the the purest

⁶⁸ Ibid, 47.

⁶⁹ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, 20.

⁷⁰ Warlick, "Leonora Carrington's Esoteric Symbolism and Their Sources," 66.

⁷¹ Carrington, *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*, 82.

possible substance: the *prima materia*.⁷² *Prima materia*, or prime material, is the all-powerful, universal spirit of all transformations in creation.⁷³ The vessel within the oven where the “cooking” and transmutation takes place is typically egg-shaped and is representative of the human body.⁷⁴

The metaphor of the human microcosm and the macrocosm of the universe lived parallel to the chemical practice for, in addition to being the predecessors of chemists, alchemists were philosophers, priests, and/or magicians. Psychoanalysts like C. G. Jung (b. 1875 – d. 1961) and historians of religion and the occult studied esoteric practices including alchemy as a search for the spiritual.⁷⁵ In the succinct installment, *Alchemy: The Great Secret* of the series *Discoveries*, Andrea Aromatico provides this description of the Hermetic theory of the universe, “Mind is whole, nature is whole, and knowledge is one. However, this unified knowledge can only be perceived as a network of reciprocal sympathies which views everything in existence in relationship to everything else.”⁷⁶

Carrington’s interests were similarly aligned. In the artist’s memoir *Down Below* (discussed further in the third chapter), she likens her body from the smallest microbe to the universe and her stomach was the vessel in which society could be transformed from chaos to harmony:

My stomach was the seat to that society, but also
the place in which I was united with all the elements of the
earth. It was the mirror of the earth. The reflection of which

⁷² Andrea Aromatico, *Alchemy: The Great Secret*, trans. Jack Hawkes, *Discoveries* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 40.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 39.

⁷⁴ James Wasserman, *Art and Symbols of the Occult: Images of Power and Wisdom* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993), 93.

⁷⁵ Aromatico, *Alchemy: The Great Secret*, 38.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

is just as real as the person reflected. That mirror – my stomach – had to be rid of the thick layers of filth (the accepted formulas) in order to properly, clearly, and faithfully to reflect the earth; and when I say ‘earth,’ I mean of course all the earths, stars, suns in the sky and on the earth, as well as all the stars, suns, and earths of the microbes’ solar system.⁷⁷

The egg appears in many works by the women surrealists. Gloria Orenstein grants the egg as used by these visionaries as thus:

I would like to recast my earlier interpretation of the egg from a one-dimensional symbol of both the alchemical alembic and female fertility... I will henceforth refer to this supreme-point symbolism of the egg, so prevalent in the work of the women surrealists, as the Egg of Rebirth. From the perspective as a symbol that incorporates past, present, and future meanings, the Egg of Rebirth may now be seen to have been prescient of the eventual rebirth and international, art-historical recognition of these fully realized artistic oeuvres, ... the iconic Egg of Rebirth symbolizes the container of the immense artistic gifts and enlightened visions that these women developed, nurtured, and protected through the darkest period of human history, until the moment was ripe for their dramatic emergence in the émigré surrealist art worlds of New York and Mexico City.⁷⁸

Carrington had long been fascinated by the alchemical egg-shaped vessels and related transmutation to painting and cooking. She acknowledged the traditional role of women providing nourishment, using themes of concocting recipes and the space of the kitchen with increasing frequency in her later works.⁷⁹ From the mid-forties onward

⁷⁷ Carrington, *Down Below*, 4.

⁷⁸ Gloria Feman Orenstein, “Down the Rabbit Hole: An Art of Shamanic Initiations and Mythic Rebirth,” in *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*, ed. Ilene Susan Fort (Prestel USA, 2012), 173.

⁷⁹ Chadwick, “Leonora Carrington: Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness,” 41.

Carrington placed greater emphasis on esoteric themes; paintings, tapestries, and sculptures from her later work are almost void of human semblance.

Just as she had given life to the chair in *Inn of the Dawn Horse*, Carrington combined animal and object in *The Oval Lady* to elevate the already significant athanor and its association with rebirth. The egg-shaped cauldron is here supported by two boar's legs and a matching ring of beastly hair around the rim. Ceremonial vessels and boars are some favorite subjects of the ancient Celts. There are magical cauldrons abound in Celtic lore. One tale boasts that Irish soldiers, killed in battle, were thrown into a cauldron, cooked through the night, and rose the next day to rejoin the fight.⁸⁰ Fierce and aggressive, boar motifs graced battle trumpets found in war graves across the Celtic world.⁸¹

The cauldron and boar are a formidable pairing; together the resurrective abilities of the vessel and the warrior-like strength that supports the object boast of Carrington's persistence and vigor she achieved during the worst time in her life.

Stag

Carrington's anthropomorphized cauldron hosts a quartet of stags. In Norse mythology, the four stags who guard the World Tree, Yggdrasil, represent the four winds.⁸² Four stags may reflect the four basic elements of alchemy and other occult practices: fire, water, air, and earth. There are also four stages the primary material goes

⁸⁰ *The Celts*, 54.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 37.

⁸² John Matthews and Caitlin Matthews, *The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures: The Ultimate A-Z of Fantastic Beings from Myth and Magic* (London: Harper Element, 2009), 435.

through in the athanor: solid, liquid, gas, and solid once more.⁸³ Her choice to depict these elements, if that is to what they refer, as stags is another homage to Celtic tradition.

A small tome on the Celts states, “The Horned One, Cernunnos, Lord of All the Stags, was one of the most potent of all the Celtic zoomorphic gods. The symbolism of the stag went beyond obvious maleness and aggressive qualities; the spreading antlers associated the king of the forest with the trees because of the similarity to branch growth. And, like deciduous species of tree, the shedding of antlers in spring and autumn made the stag the embodiment of the cyclical growth-decay-growth of nature.”⁸⁴ The Celts frequently buried their dead with antlers, signifying the stag’s important symbol of death and rebirth.⁸⁵ The egg-shaped cauldron acts as alchemical womb, highlighting the metaphoric rebirth of the stags as the renewed, fertile, green spring of *The Oval Lady*.

Creatures of death: bats, bodies, and buzzards

The shrouded people, the wispy visages gathered at the fountain, the bats, and the carrion-feasting birds are fairly obvious images of darkness and death. Bats, partially due to their nocturnal nature, have long been associated with beings who haunt the darkness and evil spirits. Biblical tradition demonized bats as the

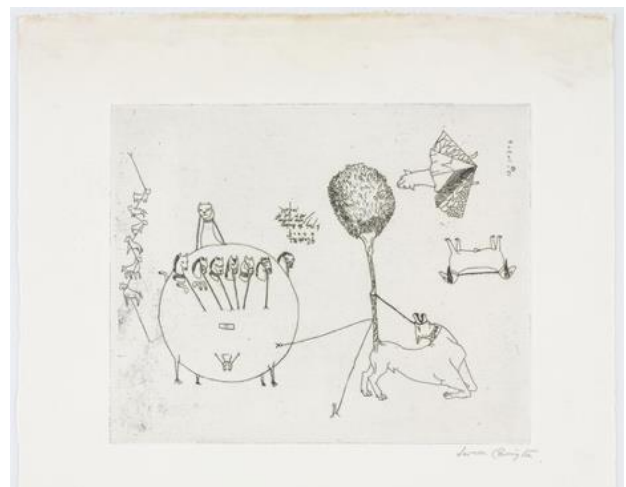


Figure 9: Leonora Carrington, Untitled, 1942, Sheet: 30.2 x 35.2 cm. Plate: 20.3 x 25.1 cm.

⁸³ Wasserman, *Art and Symbols of the Occult: Images of Power and Wisdom*, 93.

⁸⁴ *The Celts*, 45.

⁸⁵ Matthews, *The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures*, 435.

devil is given their shape. In Africa they are believed to be spirits of the dead.⁸⁶

When Carrington was studying at Miss Penrose's finishing school in Italy, she created a series of notebook drawings titled "Florence, 1933: A Collection of Extracts." The images include bats, spiders, a monkey holding a magic book, and another book with the title "Black Sorcery."⁸⁷ It is clear that she too associated these animals with darkness. In "The Debutante", a bat acts as a bad omen, "I remember that I was reading Gulliver Travels by Jonathan Swift. About an hour later, I noticed the first signs of trouble. A bat flew in at the window, uttering little cries. I am terribly afraid of bats."

An untitled etching [fig. 9] published in VVV alongside excerpts of her first draft of *Down Below*, a large bat is drawn, wings wide, alongside other animals. The tree and tethered creature were recreated in *The Oval Lady*. Bats roost in trees or in caves but Carrington has grouped them below ground among the presumably dead cocooned bodies.

Ghosts, dead animals and humans, and people with cadaver-esque figures are sprinkled throughout the character lists of Carrington's stories and paintings. As already discussed, Cyril was ceremoniously dressed like a mummy in "Monsieur Cyril de Guindre." His friend Thibaut was described as having the golden skin of a child's well-preserved corpse.⁸⁸ The dead yet immaculate forms in *The Oval Lady* and *Monsieur Cyril de Guindre* remind one of Christ's resurrection. The theme of life, death, and rebirth is a tightly woven thread in these works.

⁸⁶ Matthews, *The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures*, 53.

⁸⁷ Warlick, "Leonora Carrington's Esoteric Symbolism and Their Sources," 59.

⁸⁸ Carrington, *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*, 78.

A nest full of eggs lie at the feet of the interred bodies. The vultures – great scavengers of the earth, attend to the nest. They may be painted below ground for, like bats, they are heralds of death. Pairing them with their eggs, however, emphasize the dual symbolism of this bird of prey. In ancient Egypt, goddesses and queens wore vulture headdresses to evoke Nechbet, the vulture goddess that embodies protective and motherly aspects.⁸⁹

The horse sparked an original interpretation of rebirth that crosses from a death in the tale of “The Oval Lady” into the cyclical nature in the painting of *The Oval Lady*. The small, stiff white horse in *The Oval Lady* is tied to and transforms into the trunk of the tree, eyes open wide with fear. Considering the cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth that the stag and cauldron represent, the miniature horse can be read in a similar manner. The horse resembles the rocking horse from *Inn of the Dawn Horse* and the story “The Oval Lady” involves a rocking horse named Tartar. Tartar is an inanimate object at the beginning of “The Oval Lady” but as they play, he mysteriously moves on his own. Like an equarian Pinocchio, Tartar is able to join in as a living creature. Lucretia’s father ruled that, because she was too old and disobeyed too many times, her favorite toy Tartar must be burned. The narrator says, “I hid behind the door and heard the old man go up to the nursery. A little while later I stopped my ears with my fingers, for the most frightful neighing sounded from above, as if an animal were suffering extreme torture.”⁹⁰ “The Oval Lady” ends with the death of the living-toy Tartar yet *The Oval Lady* returns Tartar to a tree where the wood of his manufactured body had grown. Like the antlers of stag that resemble the branches of the seasonally changing trees, the horse (placed directly

⁸⁹ Matthews, *The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures*, 503.

⁹⁰ Carrington, *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*, 15.

opposite the stags, mirroring their similar symbology) changes again into a toy and again into the material from whence it was formed.

Dog

Dogs appear in mythologies across the globe. The three-headed dog Cerberus is the monstrous guardian of the Greek underworld, Phoenician traditions associate the dog with the sun, and the Book of Revelation proclaimed dogs to be companions of sorcerers, fornicators, and blasphemers. They are most frequently associated with hunting, healing, and death. In addition to being associated to the hunt and deities thereof, the Celts believed dog saliva had healing properties.⁹¹

The Dutch masters of the seventeenth century including dogs in their painting as a metaphor for unrepressed human instinct or a symbol of loyalty.⁹² Again it may be appropriate to read the painting as a mirror of Carrington's experience at the sanatorium. Dr. Luis Morales had a dog, Moro, who was his constant companion. Moro became a warning sign, connecting the loyal dog to the dreaded arrival of Morales and the sinister treatment that followed.

⁹¹ Matthews, *The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures*, 136-138.

⁹² Piers Beirne, "Hogarth's Animals," *Journal of Animal Ethics* 3, no. 2 (2013): 142 and 150, accessed June 25, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/janimaethics.3.2.0133>.

CHAPTER III

BESTIARY FROM DOWN BELOW

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a dark forest,
For the straightforward pathway had been
lost.

– Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto I: 1-3



Figure 10: Leonora Carrington, *Down Below*, 1941, 40 × 59.7 cm

Down Below and Down Below

Down Below (1943) is a dark pastoral. The palette of rich greens and blues are complemented by the occasional white, the vibrant reds, and golden highlights. The foreground combines an eclectic mix of creatures. On the far right is a winged figure clad in a symphony of textured fabrics of midnight blue and lush green. The presence of wings and the graceful posture relay a heavenly nature while the ensemble of blooming flowers

and leafy accents convey an earthly nature. The face is relaxed, emoting a calm indifference. Seated are four human hybrids: a womanly figure with a hairless, ram-horned head that ends in a multitude of teeth dons a black bustier and red thigh-high boots; an androgynous red-head with facial hair and a torso shaped like a shell reclines at the front-center of the group, resting their hand on a Venetian looking mask; a white, feathered creature on the left has the face of a bird and the body of a woman; and in the back, barely discernable from the similarly hued landscape is a green-skinned being only visible from the black hair down to mid torso. With the exception of the mustached humanoid in the front, each being has been painted with ample breasts.

The choice of colors and creatures in *Down Below* are products of her appreciation of Renaissance art she witnessed during her travels in Italy and Spain. This painting imitates the dark, earthy hues of Pisanello [fig. 11], the horizontally lined positions of the figures across landscape like Paolo Uccello [fig. 12], and the grotesque creatures of Hieronymus Bosch. Carrington's later preference to use tempera paint can be traced to early Renaissance artists like Francesco di Giorgio.⁹³ The group of human-hybrids sitting on the left side in *Down Below* bring to mind the compositional element of Titian's *Pastoral*



Figure 11: Pisanello, *The Vision of Saint Eustace*, c. 1438-1442, 54.8 x 65.5 cm



Figure 12: Paolo Uccello, *Adoration of the Magi* (fragment), 1435-1440, 20.5 x 82 cm

⁹³ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, 19.

Concert [fig. 13] – the famous representation mixes classes of men and portrays the



Figure 13: Titian, *Pastoral Concert*, 1509, 105 x 137 cm

muses of art and song to convey the ideal balances for a Renaissance life: active and contemplative, prosperity and humility, human and divine.

Just as the great minds of the Renaissance era used ancient wisdom to apply to contemporary issues, so too did

Carrington. The accounts within the

memoir are the beginnings of her own renaissance. She attempted to personally resolve the turmoil of war into a state of harmony by recreating mythologies, turning preconceived notions of “wild” women and beastly creatures inside out, and literally purifying the world by cleansing herself. It can be assumed that *Down Below* is a companion piece to the written *Down Below*.

Carrington had been living at St. Martin d’Ardecche with Max Ernst from 1938 until his arrest by the Nazi regime in 1940. The abrupt separation from her partner and fear for her own potential arrest caused a depression and subsequent terrors. Her mental break led to *Down Below*, a series of autobiographical essays which were later compiled into a memoir. In the memoir she frequently referenced of a villa on the asylum’s campus, Villa Abajo (Below.) This was where patients were to be housed toward the end of their treatment, just prior to their release. She developed an obsession with figuring out how to be permitted into this desired residence. The epistolary format of *Down Below* read like an alchemist’s diary, chronicling a quest to obtain the philosopher’s stone.

Alchemical imagery allowed Carrington to establish profound connections between individual experience and cosmic unity.⁹⁴ She even likened her body being subjected to seizure-inducing therapy to alchemical transmutation processes within a vessel noting the purification aspect in particular.

A friend, Catherine, had successfully helped Carrington leave Nazi occupied France. “For Catherine, the Germans meant rape. I was not afraid of that, I attached no importance to it. What caused panic to rise within me was the thought of robots, of thoughtless, fleshless beings.”⁹⁵ In route to Madrid with friends, Carrington’s mental and physical strength diminished. They stopped in Andorra for a few days and took walks across the mountain side. Carrington discovered she could not climb – she felt “jammed.” “I was trying to understand this vertigo of mine: that my body no longer obeyed the formulas established in my mind, the formulas of old, limited Reason; that my will no longer meshed with my faculties of movement, and since my will no longer possessed any power, it was necessary first to liquidate my paralyzing anguish, then to seek accord between the mountain, my mind, and my body... One day I went to the mountain alone. At first I could not climb; I lay flat on my face on the slope with the sensation that I was being completely absorbed by the earth... Gradually. However, perceptively and visibly, it all became easier, and in a few days I was able to negotiate jumps. I could climb vertical walls as good as any mountain goat.” Having mastered the anguish that jammed her mind and body with help from the mountain, she made a pact with the animals. “I proposed to myself an agreement with the animals: horses, goats, birds. This was accomplished through the skin, by means of a sort of ‘touch’ language ... The fact

⁹⁴ Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 85.

⁹⁵ Carrington, *Down Below*, 6.

remains that I could draw near animals where other human beings put them to precipitate flight.”⁹⁶

They had not been in Madrid long when she met Van Ghent, a Dutchman who was connected with the Nazi government. Van Ghent’s nephew worked for Imperial Chemicals, a company with which Carrington’s family did business. This minuscule relation still gave reason for Van Ghent to visit Carrington during her stay at Hotel Roma. An increasingly paranoid Carrington believed Van Ghent had been lacing her cigarettes with drugs and that he had a power to manipulate people with his eyes and that he generated zombies who executed warfare under Hitler’s orders.

She met with the Consul of the British Embassy and tried to convince him that the war was being hypnotically waged by Hitler whose Spanish representative was Van Ghent. She further rationalized that she and the Consul should stop “wandering through the labyrinths of politics” because “it was essential to believe in our metaphysical force and divide it among all human beings, who would thus be liberated.”⁹⁷ One phone call from the Consul to Dr. Martinez Alonzo ended Carrington’s freedom.

Alonzo attempted to treat her madness with bromide and bed rest, but after fifteen days of Carrington voicing her bizarre war theories and refusing to stay clothed, he transferred her to another physician, Alberto N. Carrington’s continual request for aid to overthrow the Nazi zombies prompted the help of yet another physician, Dr. Pardo, and brief stay at a sanitorium run by nuns. When the nuns refused to any longer house Carrington, Alberto and Pardo pretended to escort her to a beach where her freedom

⁹⁶ Ibid, 9-11.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 16.

would finally be granted. En route to Santander, Spain, she was dosed with heavy drugs and instead taken to Dr. Morales' insane asylum.

Carrington was treated as a wild-child even in the hands of her guardians at the sanatorium. Upon entry to Dr. Morales' Santander insane asylum in 1940, she "fought like a tigress"⁹⁸ and was treated as such - they tied down with leather straps and prefaced any mercy with the demeaning phrase, "Will you be a good girl?"⁹⁹

As Jungian psychoanalyst Clarissa Pinkola Estés says, it is no coincidence that wild animals and "wild" women have similar reputations; they share related instinctual archetypes. Wolves, coyotes, and other wild creatures, like women, are stereotyped as ungracious, innately dangerous, and ravenous. Carrington fits the Wild Woman archetype as defined by Estes. *Wild* is used in the original sense: describing a life lived naturally in which the creature has innate integrity, healthy boundaries, and wisdom.¹⁰⁰

After her experience with the Nazi "zombies" and her horrific stay at Dr. Morales' asylum in Santander, Spain, Carrington's well-known black humor grew darker. Recognizable creatures were still present in her paintings, but the population of mythical beings and hybrid creatures grew. *The Oval Lady* and *Down Below* were painted with that year still fresh in her mind. While *The Oval Lady* is arguably a more optimistic painting with themes of rebirth and a lighter palette, *Down Below* hints at darker themes with monstrous beings.

Bestiary

⁹⁸ Ibid, 22.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 23-25.

¹⁰⁰ Estés, *Woman Who Run with the Wolves*, 7.

Winged Figure

Outside this garden, so green and so fertile, there is
an arid landscape; to the left, a mountain on top of which
stands a Druidic temple. That temple, poor and in ruins, is
my temple, it was built for me, also poor and in ruins;
containing only some dry wood, it will be the place I shall
live, calling on you everyday; then I shall teach you my
Knowledge. – Leonora Carrington to Dr. Luis Morales¹⁰¹

Down Below might be a painting of the fertile garden of which she spoke as there appears to be mountains and a castle or temple in the background. Some writers, like Aberth and Alyce Mahon, interpret the angelic figure standing in the far right of *Down Below* as Carrington's self-portrait; a modern Rhiannon led there by the white horse to rescue the four seated figures from the same sanitorium of which she had escaped a couple years prior.¹⁰²

Assuming this is a version of the vision she shared with Dr. Morales, it is a fantasy image of the asylum. This fantasy is populated by animal-human hybrids that Bosch would approve and even hosts a “pleasure pavillion” [fig. 14] commonly painted into lavish (and sinful) landscapes during the Renaissance.

A Pegasus motif graces the top of the arched entry into the garden. Pegasus, the winged horse from Greek mythology, born from the seeds of Poseidon and Medusa's union, is

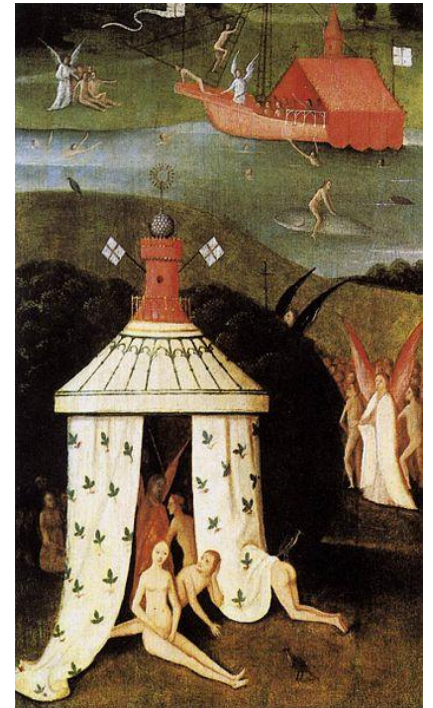


Figure 14: Hieronymus Bosch, *Paradise* (fragment of a *Last Judgement*), c. 1504, 33.9 x 20 cm

¹⁰¹ Carrington, *Down Below*, 30-31.

¹⁰² Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, 50.

appropriately painted above the gorgon's head. A favorite of the muses, Pegasus became a pack beast for Zeus's thunderbolts.¹⁰³ Pegasus and gorgon together invites further Greek myth contemplation.

The winged figure, if not Carrington herself, fits the description of Nyx, the goddess of night, daughter of Chaos, and mother of Day and Light.¹⁰⁴ Chaos was a shapeless mass of deadweight that existed before earth, the sea, and the heavens. Seeds of life slumbered within this, the most ancient of the gods, including the egg of Nyx. She is clothed in darkness and often depicted as having black wings.¹⁰⁵ She is considered the mother of death, sleep, and dreams and brought forth Aether (Air) and Hemera (Light.)¹⁰⁶ Like a poet using Nyx as a similie for darkness preceeding light, Carrington uses this figure as a herald of what came after the nightmarish life in the sanitorium.

Further reason this winged being could be Nyx is the connection with Tartar. Tartar is the name Carrington gives the rocking horse in her story "The Oval Lady." Because Carrington repeatedly used the image of a white rocking horse in her paintings, Tartar becomes as important as any white horse in regards to her work. This possible Nyx in *Down Below* is accomponied by a white horse. Tartarus is the deepest region of the Greek underworld where Zeus sent the sinful Titans.¹⁰⁷ Some translations of the Greek creation myth personify Tartarus, making him Nyx's brother as they sprang from Chaos at the same time. The root of the word Tartarus is tartar, which refers to the crude

¹⁰³ Matthews, *The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures*, 369.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology: The Age of Fable, the Age of Chivalry, Legends of Charlemagne* (New York: Modern Library, 1980), 931.

¹⁰⁵ Christopoulos, Menelaos, Olga Levaniouk, and Efimia D. Karakantza, eds. *Light and darkness in ancient Greek myth and religion*. Lexington Books, 2010.

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¹⁰⁶ E. M. Berens, *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome: Being a Popular Account of Greek and Roman Mythology* (United States: Xist Publishing, 2016), 141.

¹⁰⁷ Edith Hamilton and Steele Savage, *Mythology* (New York: Mentor, 1982), 39.

deposits found on teeth. Jung said, “Tartar settles on the bottom of the vessel, which in the language of the alchemists means ‘in the underworld Tartarus.’¹⁰⁸

Chaos gave way to a fierce goddess with black wings, Nyx, who brought light, Hemera, into the world. The dark pit of hell, Tartarus, emerged with Nyx. In the fashion of epic Greek poetry and the psychoanalytic mind of Jung, the winged figure in *Down Below* can be read as a metaphoric messenger to the creatures of hell (and to Carrington of the hellish sanatorium), explaining that the light will come.

Gorgon

Down Below’s central figure is the horned woman-beast. Her body is no doubt human, but the head could be that of the classic gorgon. The most widely-known gorgon is Medusa, a monstrous female with snakes atop her head, huge teeth, and brazen claws.¹⁰⁹ The Romanian Bestiary, as translated by Guy Mermier, defines Gorgon as thus:

The bird called gorgon is a terrible bird which brings death. It looks like a beautiful woman and a whore. Its hair resembles the hair of the dragon and its eyes give death. The gorgon laughs and dances in its time and it wanders in the whirlpools of the sea in the West. When it is ready to mate in order to have offspring, it calls men, animals, and wild beasts, and speaks to them. And if anyone comes to the



Figure 15: *Gorgon-Sister Pursuing Perseus*, From red-figure amphora, 5th c. BC. Munich Antiquarium collection

¹⁰⁸ Brian Clark, “Poseidon and Hades: Unconscious and Underworld,” 13, accessed July 29th, 2019, <https://www.atrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/poseidon-hades-neptune-pluto-brian-clark.pdf>.

¹⁰⁹ Bulfinch, *Bulfinch’s Mythology*, 115-116.

gorgon, sees it, and hears it, he dies.¹¹⁰

Carrington's black-bustiered being could be perceived as being dressed like a "whore" and her left arm is positioned as if offering her voluptuous form. The Romanian Bestiary and Bulfinch's mythology emphasize the female body as a danger to men and is reflected by this figure. The most popular story of Medusa being slain by Perseus brings about an additional purpose for depicting the horned, large toothed, haunting-eyed visage.

Perseus carried the head of Medusa with him, using it to defend him against ill-wishes. After Atlas refused Perseus refuge, Perseus turned the giant into a great mountain with the petrifying powers of the disembodied gorgon's eyes.¹¹¹ The universal belief in the Medusa's power led to masks becoming favorites as protectors. Elworthy claims, "Probably the root idea of the efficacy of any amulet lying in its strangeness, whether provocative of fear or laughter, may have led to the grotesque and impossible faces which are so frequently to be seen."¹¹²

Another possibility of this head is that it is human underneath a non-gorgon mask. Ritualistic initiations, hypnotic trance states, and other cultural practices performed by indigenous tribes, or "primitive" peoples, inspired many Western artists during second World War. Surrealist primitivism, which inspired Carrington, loved the art of the tribal mask. Breton was himself an avid collector of masks. Bretonian surrealists, including Carrington, connected primitive art and other ceremonial objects to the supernatural world. Supernatural powers were given form of masks of hybrid figures and animals,

¹¹⁰ Mermier, "The Romanian Bestiary: An English Translation and Commentary on the Ancient "Physiologus" Tradition," 36.

¹¹¹ Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology*, 117-118.

¹¹² Elworthy, *The Evil Eye*, 120-121.

producing a symbolic, conceptual art. In her thorough study of cult objects from Indo-European cultures, archeomythologist Marija Gimbutas explains that the primary purpose of the mask was “to transform and spiritualize the body and to surpass the elementary and corporeal.”¹¹³ She goes on to say, “Masks are the receptacle of invisible divine sources and their appearance in art throughout history are representations of ritual and mythological scenes.”¹¹⁴

Gorgons, or other grotesque faces, were used by ancient civilizations in an ironic way. The evil which the monstrous face, or magically equipped mask, was believed to produce is in turn used as protection from that very same evil. Used as an evil-eye amulet, these hideous masks were thought to absorb the influence of evil and protect the person who wore or displayed said mask.¹¹⁵

Asger Jörn, artist of a post-World War II art group called CoBrA (or COBRA), painted many creaturely masks and, like Carrington, was interested in painting human-beast hybrids. Hal Foster noted that Jörn’s primitive inspired masks are used to express psychic experiences in dramatic form.¹¹⁶ Carrington’s memoir and painting, both *Down Below*, dramatically express her psychic trials in two formats; the writing in her memoir drapes a veil of alchemical mystery and metaphor over the torturous treatments which are justifiably impossible to communicate; and the ugly yet comical depiction of the “gorgon” created a powerful amulet or memory of the asylum.

¹¹³ Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 BC: Myths and Cult Images* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 38.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 66.

¹¹⁵ Elworthy, *The Evil Eye*, 112.

¹¹⁶ Hal Foster, “Creaturely Cobra,” *October* 141, Asger Jörn (2012): 15, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41684274>

Bird Woman

The figure seated on the very left of the group of human hybrids is in the form of a woman covered in in dainty white feathers with long, white hair atop her bird head.

Many avian humanoids exist in the world's mythologies, but their anatomies are usually



Figure 16: Late Vinca Culture, Figurine from Vinca, Yugoslavia, c. 4500 BC, 15 x 6 cm

the reverse: Greek Harpies were winged sisters with the body and sharp talons of birds but the faces and drooping breasts of hags¹¹⁷;

Ba in Egyptian mythology was a human-headed bird that represented one's soul as it passes from the earthly body¹¹⁸; and the Sirens of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have "feathers and feet of birds" but still have "maidens' features."¹¹⁹

During Gimbutas's research on the sacred clay figurines from Indo-European archaeological sites, she found countless female figures with bird heads. She coined the umbrella term Bird Woman [*fig. 16*] to indicate the various depictions of avian-women that might be of one or more bird deities. Bird Women originate from the Neolithic Vinča culture and their peoples' affinity for the

Bird Goddess who, similar to the Greek myth of Nyx, came from and produced the primordial egg of creation.¹²⁰

Carrington was truly influenced by a great number of mythologies, but some of her creations should be noted for their originality. In one of Carrington's short stories,

¹¹⁷ Matthews, *The Element Encyclopedia of Magical Creatures*, 228-229.

¹¹⁸ Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 BC*, 176.

¹¹⁹ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, ed. Robert Squillace, trans. Frank Justus Miller (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), 99.

¹²⁰ Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 BC*, 101-102.

“The Sisters” (1939), sisters Juniper and Drusille have a peculiar living arrangement. Beautiful Drusille is frequently courted by the king so Juniper is exiled to the dark attic where she is fed only honey and water that must last for six days at a time. “Perched on a rod near the ceiling, an extraordinary creature looked at the light with blinded eyes. Her body was white and naked; feathers grew from her shoulders and round her breasts. Her white arms were neither wings nor arms. A mass of white hair fell around her face, whose flesh was like marble.”¹²¹

Juniper, the white bird-woman, turns out to be an imprisoned monster of sorts, sequestered away for her need and passion to see the moon and drink blood. Carrington, too, felt like a monster being imprisoned for her instinctual passion to eradicate the “zombies” and for her desire to become one with nature. Perhaps each creature seated within the fantastical garden of *Down Below* is a personified aspect of Carrington’s creaturely notions during her time caged in the sanatorium.

Stomach

This is an entry associated to the idea of the stomach as an entity. The memoir *Down Below* is full of references to Carrington’s body, mainly her stomach. She gives the stomach such power that it can be characterized and analyzed as an individual. Though it is not visibly in the painting, the idea of fear and othering fits the overarching theme of *Down Below*.

After the arrest of Ernst, Carrington spiraled into a sickness of mind and body. She sought control over her corporal body and psyche. She believed that by accessing

¹²¹ Carrington, *The Complete Stories of Leonora Carrington*, 91.

esoteric interconnections she could gain power over the celestial bodies and thus cleanse the world of evil.

For twenty-four hours I indulged in voluntary vomitings induced by drinking orange blossom water and interrupted by a short nap. I hoped that my sorrow would be diminished by these spasms, which tore at my stomach like earthquakes. I know now that this was but one of the aspects of those vomitings: I had realized the injustice of society, I wanted first of all to cleanse myself, and then go beyond its brutal ineptitude.¹²²

After spending three weeks alone her friend Catherine arrived. Catherine persuaded Carrington that her declining health was due to an unconscious desire to eliminate Ernst from her concerns if she wanted to live.¹²³ Catherine's suggestion brings forth the idea of Carrington and abjection. It appeared that the trauma of losing Ernst was equivalent of a violent bio-drive break, leaving a void that was open and vulnerable for objects of fear. In Kristevan psychoanalysis, a phobic object appears in the non-objective drive – the inward-drive that's purpose is self-preservation.¹²⁴ Carrington's fear materializes as hallucinations:

I would see before me , on the road, trucks with legs and arms dangling behind them, but being unsure of myself, I would say shyly: 'There are trucks ahead of us,' just to find out what the answer would be. When they said: 'The road is wide, we'll manage to bypass them,' I felt reassured; but I did not know whether or not they saw what was carried in those trucks, greatly fearing I would arouse

¹²² Carrington, *Down Below*, 4

¹²³ Ibid, 5-6.

¹²⁴ Estelle Barrett, *Kristeva Reframed*, Contemporary Thinkers Reframed (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 100-101.

suspicious and becoming prey to shame, which paralysed me.¹²⁵

Hallucinations such as this emerge to prevent internal collapse when there is an absence of the drive for an object.¹²⁶

Abjection lies on the boundary of “I” and “not I,” or other. The bodily purges Carrington describes in the memoir *Down Below* is like a ritual exclusion. “Madrid was the world’s stomach and that I had been chosen for the task of restoring this digestive organ to health. I believed that all anguish had accumulated in me and would dissolve in the end... The dysentery I suffered from later was nothing but the illness of Madrid taking shape in my intestinal tract.”¹²⁷ By dispelling her body of Ernst or evil, or acknowledging the separation of herself from other, she metaphorically released herself from a collective existence.

This was the first stage of my identification with the external world. I was the car. The car was jammed on account of me, because I, too, was jammed between Saint-Martin and Spain. I was horrified by my own power. At that time I was still limited to my own solar system, and was not aware of other people’s systems, the importance of which I realise now.¹²⁸

Carrington as being understood as Wild Woman archetype also requires the conscious straddling of instinct and control. The wild woman nature means to be aware, alert, and draw on innate feminine powers of intuition. As in all art, according to Estes,

¹²⁵ Carrington, *Down Below*, 8.

¹²⁶ Barrett, *Kristeva Reframed*, 101.

¹²⁷ Carrington, *Down Below*, 12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 7.

the wild woman “resides in the guts, not in the head” because “invention is the instinctive nature’s main occupation.” Carrington’s gut instinct (and attention to her literal gut) is the driving force of not only her art and creative writing, but her feminine senses and mental health.¹²⁹

Dr. Luis Morales said of Carrington fifty years after her time under his care, “Surrealism was a prophylaxis” and that her diagnosis of psychosis was likely influenced by the disturbing belief in the magical, primitive, and illogical world-view a la surrealism. Dr. Morales wondered even if Carrington was actually sane in 1941 and simply diagnosed ill due to the adaptation of the conventional society at the time.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Estés, *Woman Who Run with the Wolves*, 11.

¹³⁰ Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art*, 46.

CONCLUSION

The bestiary format organizes the otherwise chaotic details of Leonora's works. A single figure on the canvas may be connected to an abundance of influences and meanings, making analysis and interpretation a difficult task. By focusing on one Carrington "beast" at a time, the interconnections are disentangled, and readings of her works are illuminated.

Carrington was a scribe and illustrator of her own experiences and fantasies. She populated her works with creatures – each one an emblem that contained a personal significance to the artist. The horse totem, for example, carried her out from the oppressive influence of her father, through the adventures with the surrealists, and out of her torturous war experience. No longer just a mere horse, a memory of home, or a world-renowned symbol of freedom, Carrington's horse is a representative for her rite of passage.

The exposure to wondrous worlds of folk tales and mythology through her mother, her mother's mother, and her nanny exhibited to Carrington the power of the female voice. These stories were the door to her imagination and encouraged a search for further sources of knowledge. Equipped with intelligence of many cultures, an affinity for symbology, and a creative mind that refused misogynistic suppression, Carrington wrote of and painted marvelous beasts that led her through the obstacles of bourgeois society and leads viewers to an understanding of her life.

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